



Praxis Paper 31

Developing a timeline for exit strategies

Experiences from an Action Learning Set with the British Red Cross, EveryChild, Oxfam GB, Sightsavers and WWF-UK

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January 2016

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Acknowledgements

This paper is based on an Action Learning Set (ALS) on exit, which ran from March 2014 – March 2015. The ALS was facilitated by Rachel Hayman and Sarah Lewis at INTRAC and was a collaborative process with five UK-based organisations: the British Red Cross, EveryChild, Oxfam GB, Sightsavers and WWF-UK.



Special thanks go to the following individuals who took part in the ALS and provided comments on and input to this paper: Clare Crawford; Daisy MacDonald; Dave Burges; Helen McInnes; Jonathan Puddifoot; Lucy Morris; Mxolisi Sibanda; Philip Hand; and Shahina Bahar.

The paper draws on a series of blogs produced by Rachel Hayman and Sarah Lewis from the ALS sessions. It was also informed by presentations given by the British Red Cross and WWF-UK at INTRAC's 2014 conference on civil society sustainability.¹ We are grateful to colleague Rick James whose thinking in INTRAC's additional blog series on exit helped shape our thinking.²

¹ Lewis et al (2015)

² See: <http://www.intrac.org/pages/en/aid-withdrawal.html>

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Executive summary

Since 2012, INTRAC has been monitoring an increase in the withdrawal of aid by international NGOs from projects, programmes, regions and countries throughout the world. Yet few organisations are publishing their experiences of exit to benefit the wider sector. As a result, many practitioners are struggling with issues including how to approach exit and how to ensure sustainability of interventions.

This paper collects and analyses learning from a year-long Action Learning Set on exit with the [British Red Cross](#),³ [EveryChild](#), [Oxfam GB](#), [Sightsavers](#) and [WWF-UK](#). Focusing on four main themes (principles and values, capacity building and relationship management with partners, staff care and personnel, and leadership) it suggests important factors for practitioners to consider at key stages in the withdrawal process and provides practical examples from each organisation. It also demonstrates how using a timeline approach helped the group to order their thinking on exits.

Key messages:

- **Leadership buy-in is crucial.** Senior staff and management need to prioritise resources for exits in order to do them well, embed learning within organisations and across teams, and ensure mistakes are not repeated.
- **Try not to leave it too late.** Think about exit and sustainability early on, at the start of relationships with partners.
- **Invest in staff care.** Adhering to legal requirements is a minimum, but practitioners should also consider going the extra mile to look after staff at headquarters and within partner organisations. This can be crucial for maintaining positive relationships and motivation.
- **Document experiences and share them externally.** Help the sector to avoid reinventing the wheel by publishing knowledge and learning on exits, including both good and bad practice.
- **Recognise the value of peer-learning.** Working on exits can be isolating and frustrating. Practitioners should feel reassured that others are facing the same challenges, and recognise the value of peer-support.
- **Consider whether a timeline approach would work for you.** Our timeline was a rough and ready tool but we found it extremely useful. It gave us a reliable approach to order our thinking, highlighted gaps, and areas for improvement.

³ Please note that throughout the paper we refer to international NGOs, however we recognise that the British Red Cross is not considered to be an NGO: National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are voluntary aid societies, auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field.

Introduction

Many international NGOs (INGOs) appear to be withdrawing from programmes, projects and partners or reviewing where and how their support is focused. Reasons for this include funding cuts by donors, decisions to reduce support to middle-income countries, changing operating environments, and shifts in strategic direction at the organisational level.⁴

Within this rapidly changing environment for international development,⁵ the number of exits is rising and is likely to increase.⁶ This raises the challenge for INGOs of how best to support partners and staff during the process and how to ensure a level of sustainability of impact, activities and legacy.

A panel convened by INTRAC in London at the 2013 Annual Conference of the UK membership body for organisations working in international development, Bond, revealed a strong interest within the sector in learning and sharing on how to develop exit strategies. It also demonstrated the types of issues INGOs were grappling with. These included understanding good practice, knowing when the right time to withdraw from a country or programme is, planning for exit, and preparing partners.

Despite this desire to learn there is a lack of easily accessible information on good practice. Few organisations are documenting their experiences or sharing these externally.⁷ As a result, recent examples of how others have actually designed, managed and implemented exit strategies are lacking.⁸

As a means to address this gap, INTRAC began facilitating an Action Learning Set (ALS) on exit in 2014 with the British Red Cross, EveryChild, Oxfam GB, Sightsavers and WWF-UK. Our aim was to improve organisational approaches to programme and project exit through promoting good practice based on experience. We also looked at country and regional exit.

In this paper we share our key learning from the ALS. We begin with an overview of the methodology used. For each of the themes covered⁹ we show how we used a timeline of exit to think through the process. We also outline the questions and issues the exercise raised; and considerations that others could take into account at key moments in the exit process. We conclude with reflections on what we learnt about exit strategies and the ALS process.

Box 1: How do we define an exit strategy?

We were interested in unpacking the terminology of aid withdrawal, such as transition, phase out, and exit, and recognise that these terms are used in different ways by different organisations (**Annex 1**).

In this paper we refer to an exit strategy as a tool used by INGOs and their southern partners to plan and structure the implementation of an exit – typically the withdrawal of financial resources or closure of an office – in a specific project, programme, country or region.

⁴ Grantcraft (2013); Hayman (2015)

⁵ The dynamics of the humanitarian-development interface around exit were not explored in full during the ALS. However they were touched upon in some meetings.

⁶ INTRAC (2012a); Jerve and Slob (2008)

⁷ Hayman (2015)

⁸ Exceptions include Levinger and McLeod (2002); Gardner et al (2005); Halper (2009); Kvinna till Kvinna (2011); WWF-UK (2014a and 2014b)

⁹ We focused on four themes: principles and values, capacity building and relationship management with partners, staff care and personnel, and leadership.

Why an ALS?

Action Learning is both an approach (philosophy) and method (technology) for developing organisations and their staff. In Action Learning, researchers and practitioners jointly engage in cycles of planning, acting, reflecting and learning (see **Figure 1**). The conventional learning process is reversed. Participants learn from their actions and experiences and implement changes to organisational and individual practices based on this learning.

Action Learning Sets (ALS) are a widely used method under Action Learning that help individuals to develop critical reflection. As exit can be a very emotive issue, using an ALS was appropriate.

Sources: Djamankulova et al (2012), Popplewell and Hayman (2012), and INTRAC (2012b).

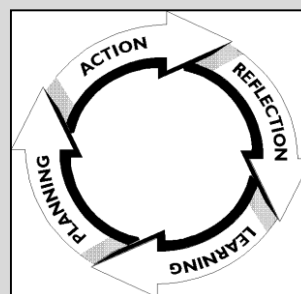


Figure 1: Action Learning cycle from Buijs et al (2012).

Designing the ALS

The inception workshop brought the group together to agree the practical details of the ALS.

Setting the scene: understanding what brought us together

What was each organisation's interest in and experiences of exit?

British Red Cross: transitioning longer-term partnerships in a specific geographical region.

EveryChild: gradually closing all international offices and programmes and transferring organisational assets to an international alliance of national organisations, called Family for Every Child.

Oxfam GB: involved in two types of country level change - withdrawing entirely from some countries and transferring responsibility for programmes to Oxfam International as a part of organisational evolution.

Sightsavers: experience of planned country exits implemented over a long timeframe (ca. 5 years) and shorter-term planned programme and project closures (ca. 3-6 months).

WWF-UK: involved in different types of exits. Some are 'full stops' at the end of contractual obligations. Others are 'spin-offs' where work that formally sat in programmes may go elsewhere either within WWF-UK or become independent.

Although financial drivers and structural change were apparent for many, exit was not driven by the same factors across the group. The timeframes and speed of exit were also different.

However, there were similarities in the group's experience of, and interests in, exit. For example, every organisation had an interest in issues of partnership and organisational culture relative to exit; likewise in sustainability of partners, impact, activities and legacy.

An overarching similarity was the group's desire to share their own practice and learn from others in order to undertake responsible exits, embed good practice and learning within organisations, and think through the implications of decisions more clearly and strategically. Many went into the process with the motivation to improve and do exits better in the future.¹⁰

Deciding on ground rules

We agreed on a set of ground rules that underpinned our meetings:

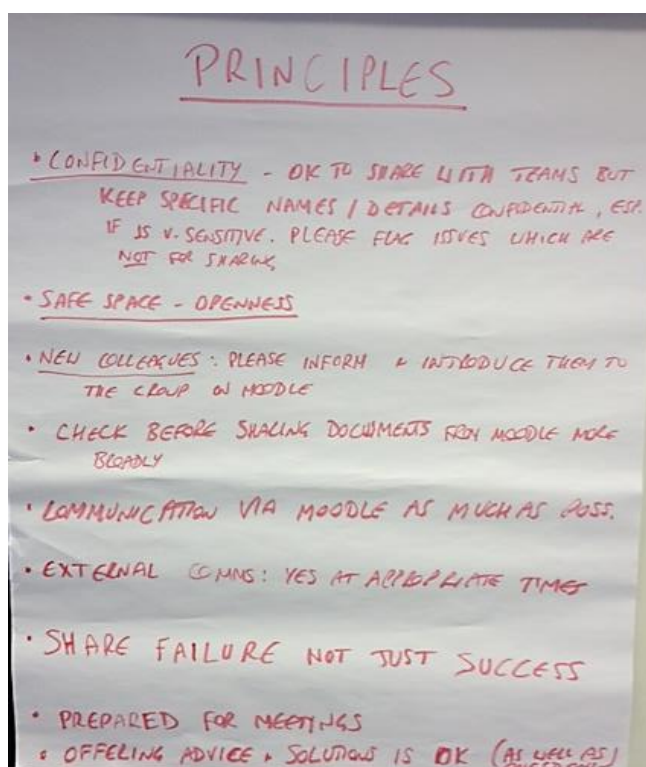


Image 1: Deciding on ground rules. INTRAC. Creative Commons Licensing.

- **Confidentiality:** sharing discussions within teams was permitted but specific names and details were to be kept confidential, especially if the issue was sensitive.
- **Safe space and openness:** being honest was encouraged, as was sharing failure not just success.
- **Offering advice and solutions:** suggesting solutions to problems others were facing was agreed, so that we could really benefit from peer learning.
- **Being prepared for meetings:** coming ready to share thoughts on the topics was considered essential in making the most from the process.
- Aiming for **continuity of participants** to maintain a good dynamic.

Agreeing our focus

So what did we want to do? By the end of the day a long list of topics had emerged that the group wanted to tackle (**Figure 2**). But this had to be narrowed down as we had just four sessions planned within the year. We decided to take an iterative approach. At the end of each meeting we would review which issues had come up repeatedly in discussions as the basis for deciding on the next topic. The topics in bold in Figure 2 are the ones we covered.

¹⁰ EveryChild was slightly different as the majority of their exits were complete by the time they joined the ALS. Instead, their ambition was to reflect on what they had learnt with others, and document their learning. See Morris (2015)

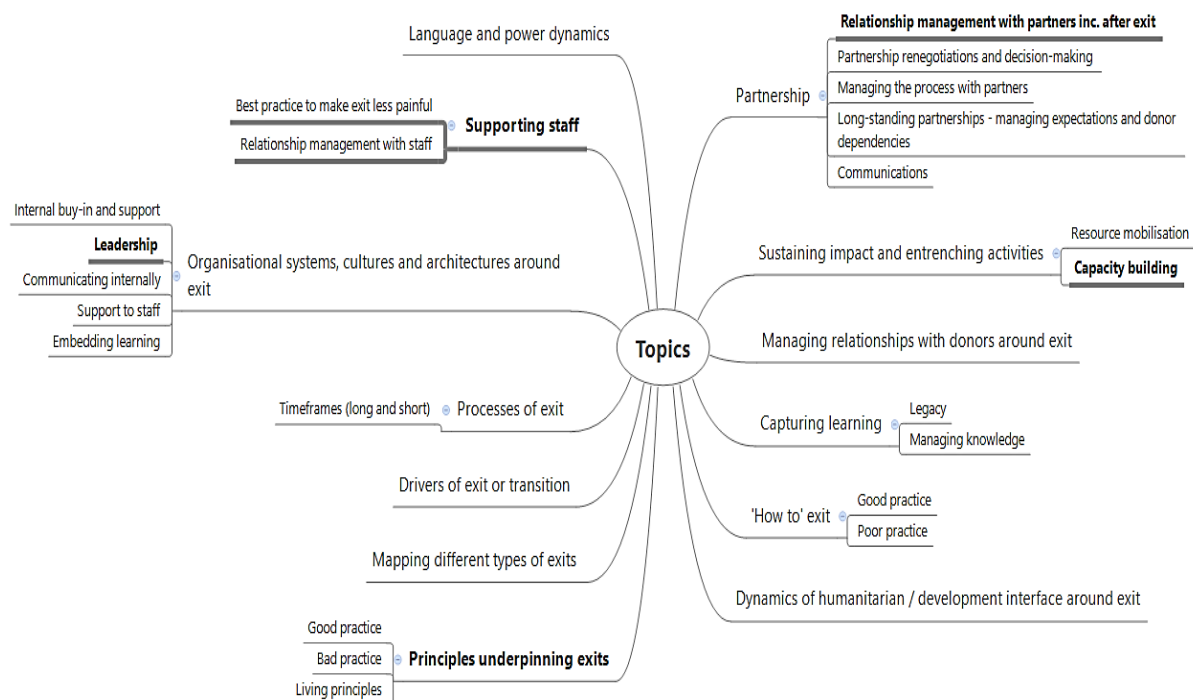


Figure 2: A wish list of topics to be explored in the ALS.

Framing our thinking: the exit timeline

In discussions on outputs of the ALS, the idea of a hypothetical timeline with milestones from programme design through to decision to exit, to actual exit, and post-closure emerged (**Figure 3**).¹¹ We recognised there was a clear distinction to make between the ideal exit timeline and the harsh reality that is often experienced.

We thought about internal factors to INGOs which shape, frame and impact on exit and termed these the organisational trajectory, including strategic planning cycles and changes in leadership; and the external context, including policy and funding situations, or emergencies in partner countries or regions. Finally, we added an organisational learning loop to encourage thinking on how knowledge from exits is fed-back and embedded into organisational systems. In reality this loop is not fixed. It is a simplistic representation of how learning from different moments in the exit process can link into organisational changes at any time.

The timeline became a framework for subsequent sessions and was a reliable approach to order our thinking.¹² For each theme, we mapped what happens across organisations at key moments, and what factors participants felt need to be in place for decisions and transitions to happen. **Figure 3** illustrates the 'blank' timeline developed at the inception workshop.

Although we didn't fully develop the timeline as a tool, we agreed it was a good idea to share it as a way of working through exit processes.

¹¹ The exit timeline was based on timeframes for programme exit, although we recognised that there may be other moments, for example, (dis)engaging in countries or regions, or with certain partners.

¹² Another way of thinking about exits may be to consider which factors need to be in place at different stages of the project cycle.

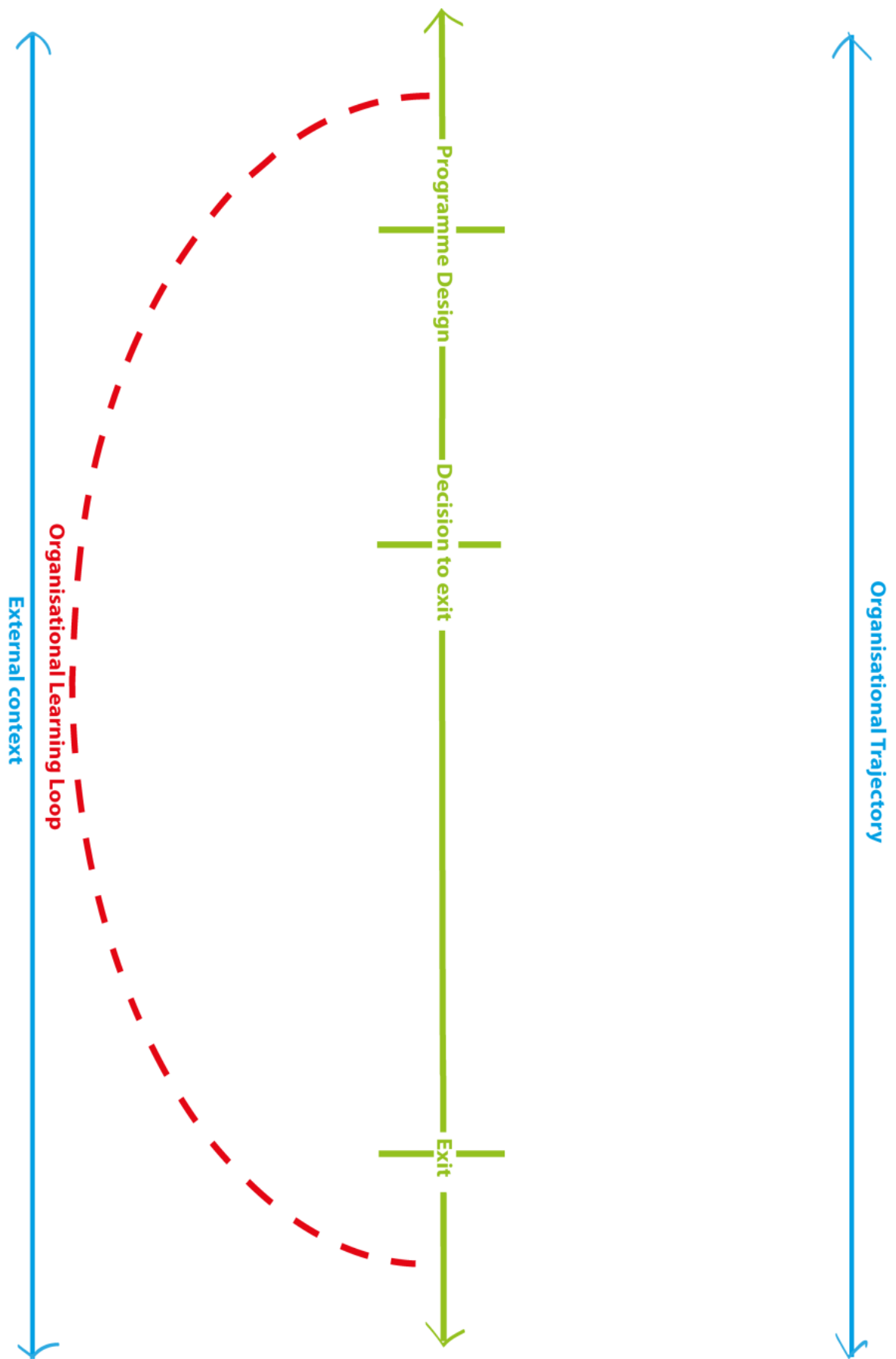


Figure 3: The 'blank' exit timeline.

Meeting 1: Principles and values underpinning exit processes

The topic of principles and values (the practices and values that guide an organisation from design of an exit strategy to behaviour throughout the process) came up many times at the inception workshop and seemed the most logical starting point for our first meeting.

The aim was to share and interrogate the principles, values, standards and practices that each organisation uses, whether formally or implicitly. We wanted to explore how embedded these were in wider organisational cultures, and capture positive and negative experiences.

We recognised that the principles and values that organisations have and apply to exit (consciously or subconsciously) vary. For example, many have partnership principles but not specific exit principles.

Ahead of the meeting we produced a summary of formal and informal principles from existing literature and guidelines (see Annex 2). We encouraged the group to think about where their own organisation's principles, values and standards sit within the exit timeline.

Rather than coming up with a fixed list of principles, during the meeting we oriented discussions towards a critical dimension, using the guiding questions in **Box 2**, and a presentation on EveryChild's responsible exit principles, as a starting point.

As things were changing very quickly within each organisation, we began the meeting with a session on 'burning issues'. The purpose was to provide an opportunity for the group to update each other, share challenges faced on exits, and identify emerging questions and issues. These included:

- **Maintaining momentum** and staff motivation during change. For some this was related to concerns about staff leaving early during the exit process.
- **Managing partnerships and relationships** when moving on.
- **Strategies for getting management buy-in** at the right times during the exit process.
- **Retrofitting** to address issues that arise during exit, and what happens when there are limited resources to deal with these.
- **Managing the tension between closure and 'keeping the door open'** for future programmes and partnerships if there is a possibility the organisation will re-engage.

Box 2: Guiding questions

- Are there formalised principles that underpin exit strategies? If not, are there explicit values or standards that underpin exit strategies?
- When were these principles/values developed?
- How were the principles developed? Who within the organisation/network was involved? What about partners and staff who might be affected?
- What happened to the principles after the exit process?

Mapping questions, issues and decisions

We used the timeline to map different types of principles, values, standards, guidance and tools, and their uses in different contexts by different organisations. **Figure 4** shows each of the group's input to the process.

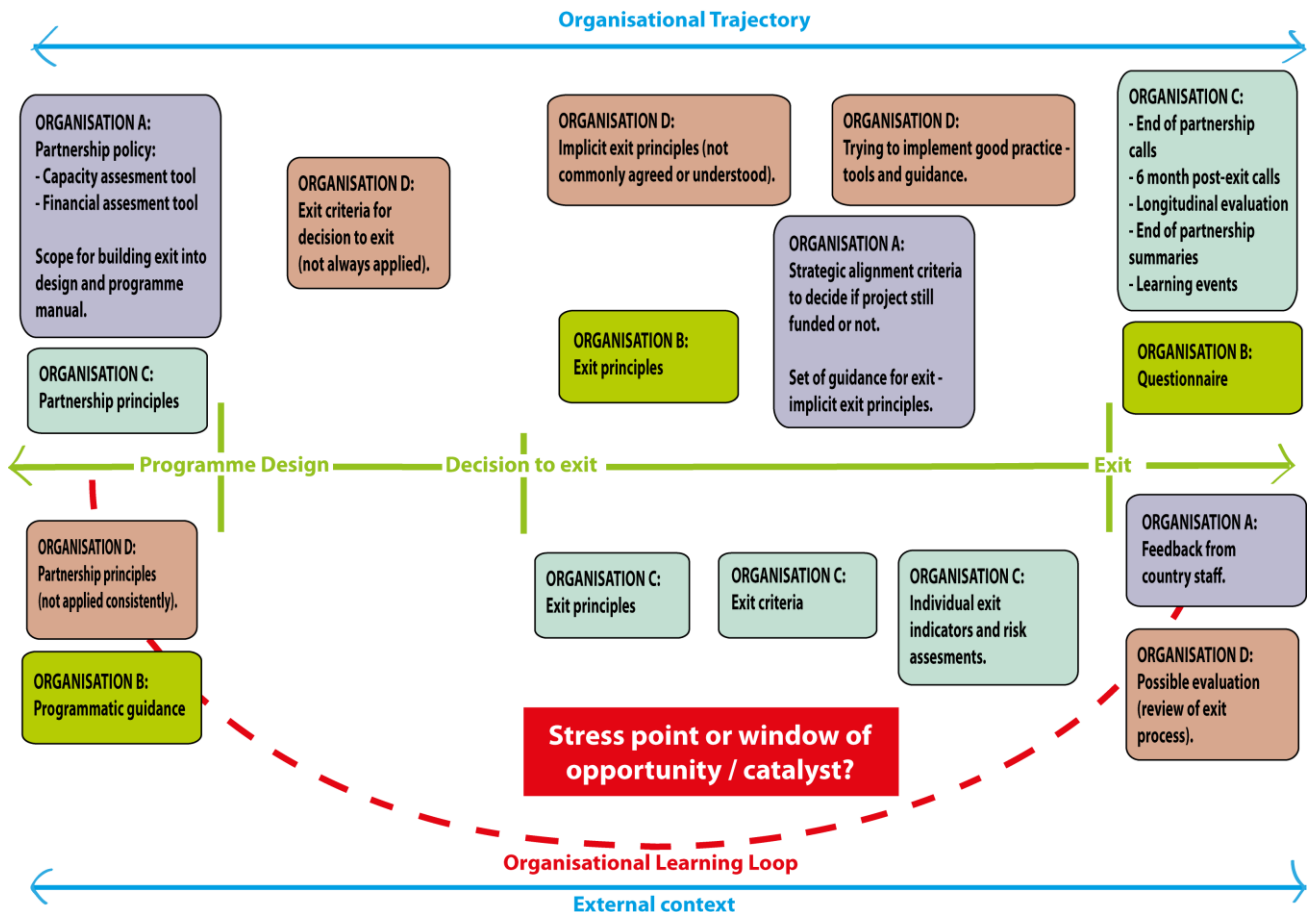


Figure 4: Principles and values in the exit timeline.

The exercise sparked a **number of discussions**, including:

→ **Is there a need for formal principles? How do these relate to other values, standards and criteria?**

The use of principles and standards, and the extent to which organisations hold themselves to account to these, varied across the organisations. We heard how EveryChild developed three principles to inform their responsible exit process. These were complemented by exit criteria (to inform decisions about when and how soon to withdraw), and exit indicators (to monitor the process).¹³

At the time of the meeting, the WWF-UK Transformations team (the team leading exits from areas of work that did not fit within new strategic focus areas) were developing six principles for use by the organisation in order to deliver well-structured and effective exits (**Box 3**).

¹³ For more information on EveryChild's responsible exit principles see Morris (2015)

Box 3: WWF-UK's principles of responsible exits

- Ensure that planning for exits is part of the strategic planning process
- Ensure (where appropriate) the long-term sustainability of the work
- Design a realistic process and timetable for implementing an exit
- Keep the momentum for positive change where we are exiting
- Ensure that the necessary capacity and funding is available to deliver the exit
- Support the staff in the projects/programmes from which we are exiting

However, our view was that not every organisation needs to have formal exit principles, for example if it already holds itself to account to partnership principles where exit, transition, and moving on often become a natural part of conversations.

→ When should principles be developed, and who should be involved?

There is guidance which recommends clarity on exit processes and rationale early on to ensure effective messaging and framing but this may not be realistic at the onset of engagement with partners. However, at the very least exit thinking should be built into planning from the beginning and kept in the conversation with partners throughout to increase the likelihood of sustainable outcomes.

Once the decision to exit has been made it is important to decide whether exit principles are needed to guide the process. Their absence can be stressful for staff as they are suddenly tasked with designing the process by which the exit will take place, but it can also be a good opportunity to engage with partners, encourage management to pay attention to the exit, and review existing guidelines and values.

Alternatively, some organisations may develop or refresh existing principles after exits, when (or if) they reflect on the process and the extent to which they are still relevant.

We also discussed involving partners in the design of principles. For EveryChild, as the decision to exit had already been made by senior management, partners were not involved in developing exit principles as it would not have been meaningful. Instead, they were involved in developing the tailored exit indicators.¹⁴

→ How can we generate an appetite for principles internally?

A number of questions were raised about how to get senior management and the wider organisation to pay attention to principles, and exits more broadly. The group's experience was that this is especially hard to do when exits have been difficult in the past and a taboo subject in the organisation. Some suggestions for encouraging others to think about these issues included using conversations on sustainability as an entry point and building principles into existing guidance and programme implementation manuals.

→ The value of principles

We agreed that the value of principles can depend on what they are being used for and by whom. For some organisations, they are useful for senior management who need to make

¹⁴ Morris (2015)

decisions but do not have time to look at detailed exit plans. For others, they are used by staff and partners as practical guidance on how to exit and are seen more as tools.

Despite the differing approaches among the group, overall we recognised that there is value in having broad principles that allow for flexibility. These can guide behaviour, and act as a useful reference point and accountability mechanism throughout the exit process. However they should not be seen as 'operating instructions' for exit.

TIPS FOR PRACTITIONERS: PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

The timeline and discussions show that principles and values are very organisation-specific. However, if you were to use a similar exercise to think through the exit process, important factors to consider at key moments include:

Before entering new partnerships or designing new programmes: decide on entry criteria.

At the start of the relationship: agree whether formal partnership and exit principles are appropriate at this stage, if they don't already exist.

At the programme design stage: build exit thinking into the design of the project or programme; apply partnership principles if appropriate.

Between programme design and the decision point to exit: think about whether you will use criteria to guide decisions on when to exit, and if so, how you will ensure they are applied consistently, for example through monitoring indicators.

At the decision point to exit: if they don't already exist, decide whether you need exit principles, especially if you already hold yourself to account to other criteria, values and standards.

If they would add value, consider whether revising existing principles within the organisation is enough, or whether you will develop new ones. If the latter is the case, think about who you are developing them for, and whose input you need. Look at existing guidance, manuals and ideas on exit to see whether elements of these could be incorporated into the principles.

Don't forget to pay attention to how partnership principles will be maintained from this stage onwards.

During implementation: use exit indicators and principles to monitor the process, review progress and keep the exit on track. If you follow formal exit principles, keep revisiting these to ensure they are still relevant. Honour implicit principles, such as those embedded in exit guidance.

Post-exit: take the time to reflect on the exit and learn from it; revise principles based on this; or think about developing principles to build into future programming if they would be deemed relevant at that stage.

Meeting 2: Capacity building and relationship management with partners

At the inception workshop and first meeting we touched upon some of the different dimensions of partnerships, including: what can be done to prepare partners for exit, how to overcome partner disbelief when there is an assumption that relationships will continue forever, and how to manage relationships during the exit process and after withdrawal.

With this in mind, we decided to focus on capacity building and relationship management with partners in the second meeting. Reducing dependency, encouraging sustainability and approaches to partnership are areas that INGOs often come under fire for, so we were keen to critically assess experiences on this topic (see **Box 4** on meeting objectives).¹⁵

Early on in the meeting, we also discussed new issues the group were facing:

- **Branding** and legal issues associated with establishing spin-offs (see **Box 5**).
- **Funding** for spin-offs.
- **Embedding** thinking on exits within existing working practices, and the importance of finding key advocates within organisations.

Box 4: Meeting objectives

- To hear experiences from Sightsavers of capacity building as part of the exit process in the Caribbean.
- To hear experiences from the British Red Cross of how partnership review processes contributed to decisions and processes on exit.
- To explore the link between partner capacity building and relationship management.
- To explore how capacity building differs in the context of planned exit vs. unplanned.

Box 5: Addressing spin-off issues – a practical example from Oxfam GB

OxyGen in Armenia and Bridge in Georgia have been established as spin-off organisations. The decision was taken to run both Oxfam country offices and these spin-offs in parallel for two years, in order to give them a good start, which is a best practice learned from other country experiences. However, there is an inherent tension between the need to support spin-offs as they start up, and the need to draw a clear boundary line where Oxfam as an organisation finishes. Spin-offs cannot take the name Oxfam, or use the logo, and yet the reputation spin-off staff have in a country is largely entwined with their previous employment as Oxfam staff. By running both organisations in parallel Oxfam can ensure as smooth a transition in identity as possible.

¹⁵ For an example of INTRAC's previous work on partnership see Brehm et al (2004)

Mapping questions, issues and decisions

The timeline helped us interrogate where partner capacity building fits in the exit process, i.e. is it a focus after the decision to exit, or already done when there is sufficient capacity and part of the reason for exit; how integral the existing capacity of partners is to exit processes; whether the organisations evaluate capacity after exit; and how the exit process is adapted if capacity is weak (see **Figure 5**).

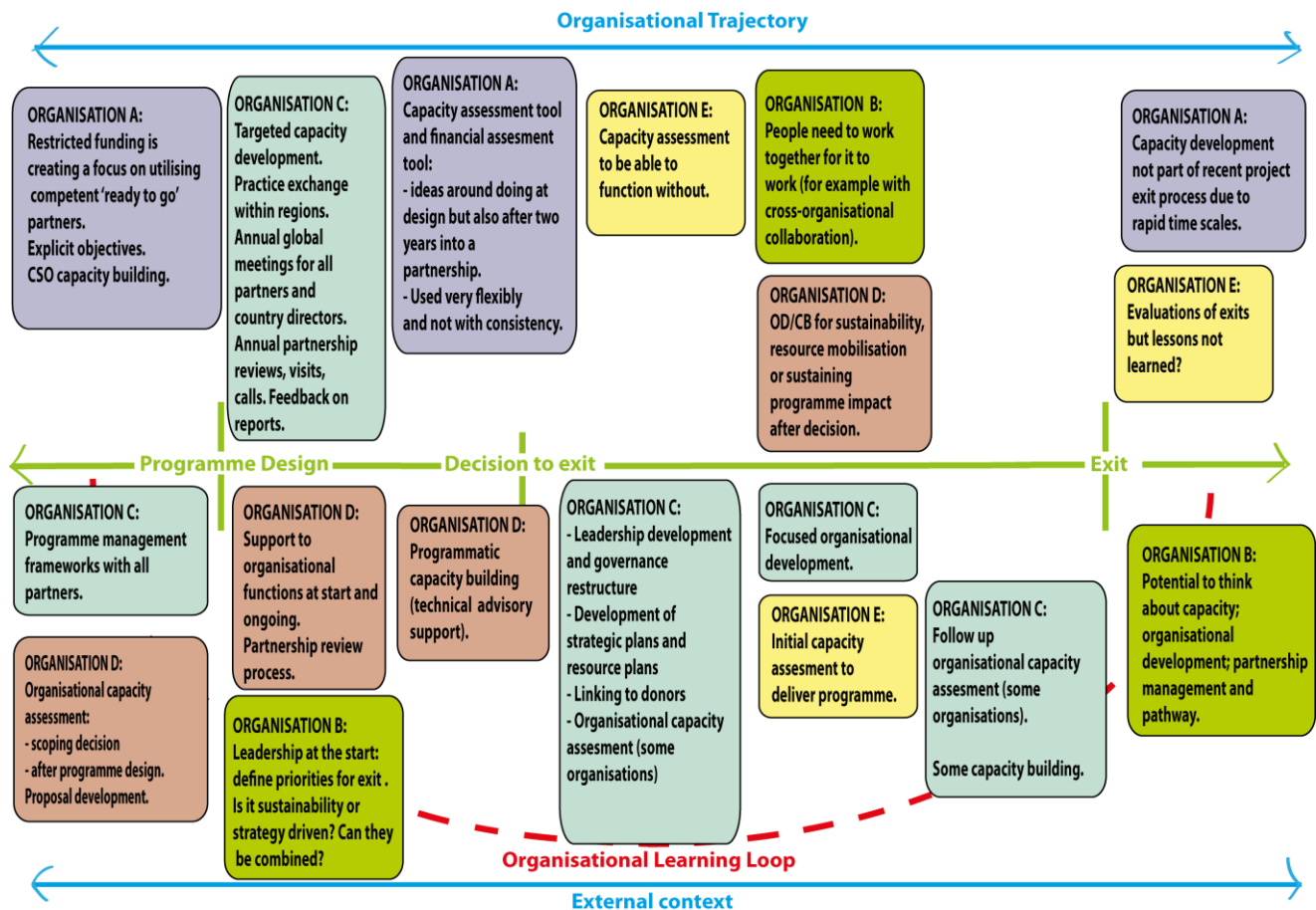


Figure 5: Capacity building and relationship management in the exit timeline.

This led us to some **key debates**, including:

→ **When do organisations start thinking about capacity building?**

We questioned at what stage INGOs start thinking about capacity building - do they consider sustainability in ongoing capacity building with partners, or do they only start taking it seriously as they prepare to leave?

The timeline and presentations revealed quite significant differences between organisations. For some, capacity building is a key component of their programmes, with exit thinking incorporated into the tools used to understand partners' strengths and weaknesses, such as organisational capacity and financial assessments, or as part of their support to partners in order to strengthen them as local or national actors. For others it is a central element of their exit strategy. Others only factor in capacity building towards the end or not at all, especially where exit timeframes are rapid.

We heard how the British Red Cross have taken a holistic approach and are integrating organisational and capacity development into partnership management. They recognise that the type of support required at exit may be very different to other stages of the partnership.¹⁶ Formal partnership review mechanisms are used to work towards more equitable partnerships. Their purpose is to improve the quality of partnerships, assess their continued added-value and relevance, and provide a baseline to monitor improvements/changes.

Sightsavers' exit processes are guided by their programme partnership policy, which includes employing regular assessment methods at different stages, including partner assessments and project evaluation. They have also used partnership review tools, and found that the amount of time dedicated to them is important.

Similar partnership tools and processes exist with Oxfam. As a means to reduce partner dependence on Oxfam the organisation has guidance on the maximum amount of funding that a partner should receive from the organisation at any one time, based on the results of a capacity assessment. Capacity development plans are usually designed for the growth of the relationship, rather than its ending. It is recognised, of course, that if a partner has been working closely with Oxfam for many years assumptions can develop about continuity of the relationship, which need to be carefully addressed ahead of time.

→ **Extending the exit timeframe**

A main focus of debate centred on the course of action an organisation should take if it emerges a partner is not at a stage of readiness for exit with sufficient capacities. In some cases, there may be a need to reassess timeframes and consider extending in order to be able to withdraw responsibly (see **Box 6**). However, there may be benefits of sticking to agreed timeframes, including avoiding sending mixed messages to partners. Making these decisions can be a stress point for those responsible for exits, for example if they face competing pressures from partners to extend, and from leadership to stick to the timeframe.

Box 6: Postponing an exit – a practical example from the British Red Cross

In late 2012, the British Red Cross made the decision to not continue programmatic support to a long-standing partner beyond existing time frames and financial commitments. A visit in early 2014 revealed that the National Society were focusing more on resource mobilisation than their existing programmes. It became apparent they had gone into 'survival mode', catalysed by the rate of the British Red Cross' exit and the departure of other funders. A decision to extend the partnership by a further year was taken, so that more support focused on financial sustainability could be provided.

This example highlights the importance of monitoring the exit process as you go along to determine progress, identifying where different types of support may be required and bringing this in from external providers where specific expertise is sought, and where decisions on adjusting timeframes may need to be taken.

¹⁶ For more information on the British Red Cross' experiences of sustainability, see: <http://www.intrac.org/blog.php/67/capacity-building-partnership-relations-and-exit-strategies>

→ Finding the balance

Finding a balance between providing capacity building and enabling partners to establish their own independence raised questions including: if the INGO intensifies its support towards the end of the programme to see through the exit responsibly, do partners have adequate absorption capacity and do they find it more difficult after the exit? Does a focus on capacity building in certain areas, such as fundraising and resource mobilisation, mean other activities are side-lined? Would it be better if the INGO disengaged slightly towards the exit?

→ Maintaining positive relationships and re-entering



Image 2: 'Exit' by Fabio Sola Penna via Flickr. Creative Commons licensing.

Another focus of debate was whether organisations consider re-entering relationships with partners after exit to ensure their survival. For some agencies, such as the British Red Cross, their humanitarian remit means they may need to re-engage at some point in the future. This highlighted the importance of maintaining positive relationships throughout the partnership, exit and after withdrawal but particularly if you are part of a larger network. As one participant put it *“there is always a chance you will see your partner at an annual gathering in the future”*. Oxfam left a spin-off organisation when it exited Iraq in 2004, only to reconnect with it again in 2015 when it returned to support the internally displaced persons crisis there.

The issue of organisations framing exit in terms of sustainability planning from the outset was also raised. The way organisations work can sometimes nurture a level of dependence amongst partners, which becomes problematic when exit decisions are made and when conversations about sustainability, including financial self-sufficiency, come to the fore. These conversations were linked to wider debates on where international organisations should draw the line in resolving issues that arise, when they should ‘let go’, and the need to be cautious of overstating impact or engagement particularly when working with sovereign organisations.

TIPS FOR PRACTITIONERS: CAPACITY BUILDING AND RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT WITH PARTNERS

Our analysis of the timeline exercise and discussions highlights the need to assess how partnerships are defined, entered into, reviewed and managed. Some areas to think about at key stages include:

At the start of the relationship: if you will be using tools to understand partners' strengths and weaknesses, build exit thinking into these and the plans that result from them. Be clear about the rationale for engagement - this will help when developing the rationale for exit.

At the programme design stage: build specific objectives on capacity and organisational development into programme design if appropriate.

Between programme design and the decision point to exit: undertake formal partnership review mechanisms if appropriate.

At the decision point to exit: review what capacity building is already in place and assess how partners are currently being supported, for example by undertaking an organisational capacity assessment. If necessary, consider doing more to increase chances of sustainability after withdrawal and decide how much you can invest in this.

Don't forget to consider whether the partner could absorb these inputs without being overloaded and be clear on where you will draw the line during exit.

During implementation: decide whether it is necessary to alter the type of capacity building support. If so, consider how you will ensure other areas are not sidelined. Monitor the process, and if it emerges that the partner isn't ready for exit, decide whether or not to extend the exit timeframe. Weigh up the pros and cons. Consider how you will maintain post-exit relationships, and the nature of these.

Post-exit: reflect on the capacity building provided, and how partnership management went. Build learning from this into strategic planning cycles and support to other partners.

Meeting 3: Staff care and personnel

From the start of the ALS, we noted an interest in care of those who are dealing with exit or implicated by it (i.e. staff that are managing the exit or affected by it and staff of partner organisations who are outside the direct responsibility chain of the exiting organisation). By the end of the meeting on capacity building and relationship management, we realised that we had been focusing a lot on partners but had not given these issues much attention.

Staff care and personnel was the focus of the third meeting. The aim was to explore how staff care can be ensured throughout the exit process to: maintain motivation, make the process less painful for those involved, retain staff, and support those moving on (**Box 7**).

We wanted to include other staff with relevant experience, and broke our own ALS rule to invite colleagues from human resources (HR) departments to join the meeting. Presentations on WWF-UK's experience of staff care, and EveryChild's experience of efforts to retain staff during a major transformation in the organisation formed the basis of discussions.

We began the meeting by reflecting on key challenges and questions faced relating to personnel and staff care, and ordered these into broad themes:

- **The role of management and HR:** How can HR help to make the transition smoother and mitigate stress-related issues? Are there specific skills that are HR-related that existing managers need?
- **Outplacement support:** How can HR help with further navigation or outplacement support?
- **Where responsibility starts and ends:** What are the levels of responsibility when it comes to exit? Does it differ if you are a long-term partner, national, local or headquarters staff? What legislation should be in place when the office is set up?
- **Staff retention:** How can staff retention be managed during periods of transition / exit? How do you continue to deliver programmes when staff are thinking of leaving? What are the best ways to support staff?
- **Retention of learning:** What do we know about how to document and institutionalise the learning from staff involved in exit?
- **Budget and resources:** What budget is needed to support offices facing staff loss?

Box 7: Guiding questions

- How can momentum and staff motivation be maintained throughout the exit process?
- What steps can be taken to make the process less painful for staff and partners?
- What can be done to retain staff during major organisational transformation? What are the incentives to stay?
- What responsibility does the exiting agency or NGO have vis-à-vis staff of partners? What types of ongoing or interim support may be useful for partners relative to personnel and staff care?

Mapping questions, issues and decisions

The timeline exercise enabled us to map out issues of staff care and where key challenges and responses come in (**Figure 6**).

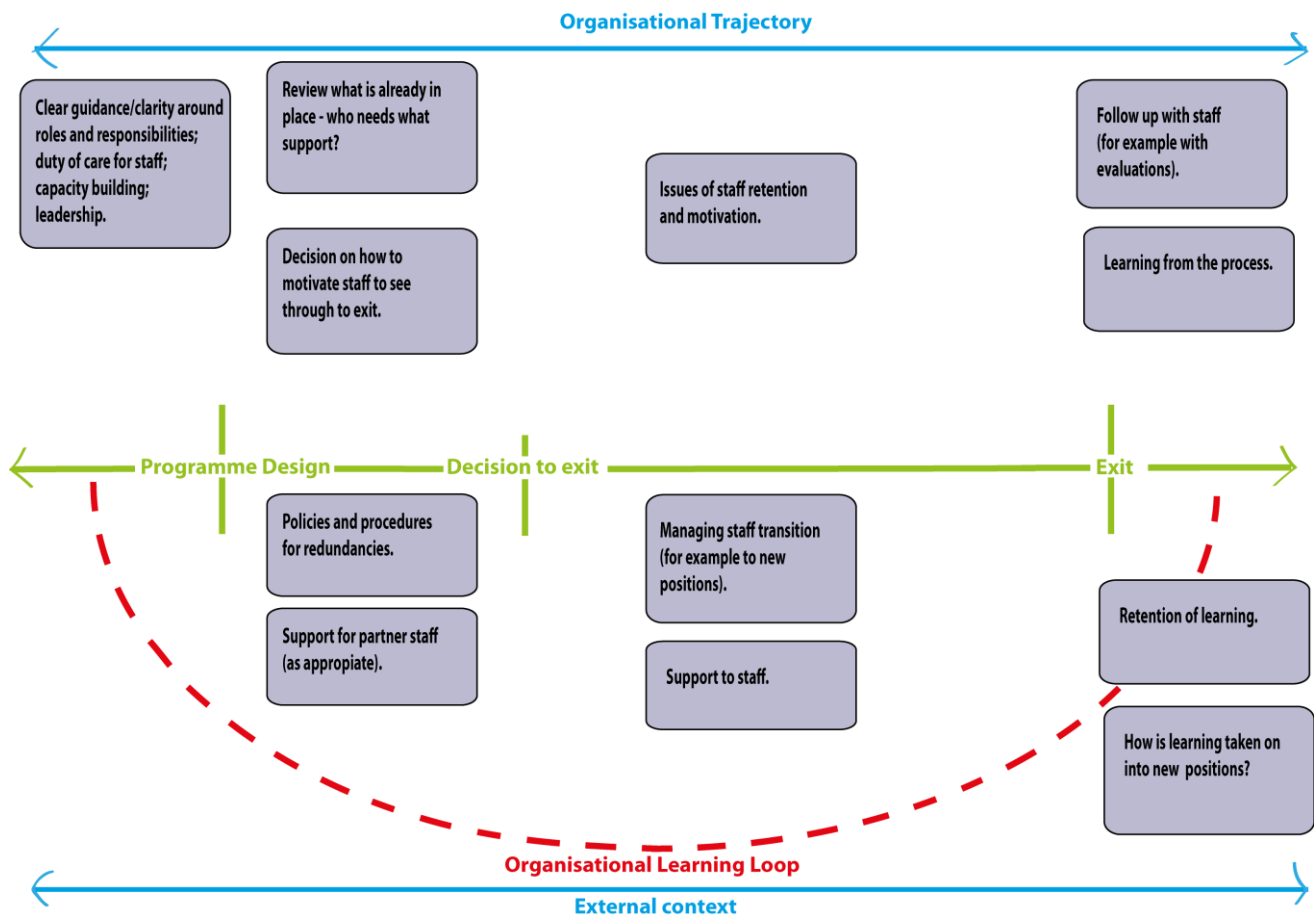


Figure 6: Staff care and personnel in the exit timeline.

Key debates during the meeting included:

→ Supporting managers

The presentations highlighted that HR departments are often small teams within large organisations, and do not have the capacity to provide direct support to all staff affected by exit. Instead, their remit is to advise and build the capacity of managers, who are often the first point of contact for staff.

However managers themselves may also face considerable psychological and personal pressure, for example balancing ongoing project management and exiting, so will require additional support. Suggestions included providing appropriate training to discuss the process with staff, as well as resilience or stress management training.

→ Deciding who should oversee exits

The pros and cons of using long-standing staff, new hires, or a mixture of both were debated. Views on this varied, and we heard examples of two very different approaches taken by organisations (**Box 8**).

Box 8: Continuity versus changes in staff – approaches taken by EveryChild and WWF-UK

In a context of strategy renewal, WWF-UK brought together a group of existing staff and new hires on fixed term contracts to oversee exits, termed the Transformations Team. This approach worked well as new staff had clear goals, were enthusiastic, and could counteract unhappiness amongst long-standing staff. As the team had dedicated and focused roles, they would ensure exits happened as planned rather than ‘drifting’ on. However, the team were perceived as being strategically separate from the organisation. Having the ‘graveyard role’ where “projects are sent to die” created challenges in terms of personnel and relationships.

EveryChild, on the other hand, placed a lot of emphasis on retaining staff, with continuity as their unwritten exit principle. Staff changes had been unsettling for country offices in the past, and the organisation saw that during stressful times knowledge retention, institutional memory, and relationships become even more important in facilitating a smooth exit process. They took a number of approaches to staff retention including providing formal training and education opportunities; introducing a flexible working policy; and team building during staff away days.

These examples demonstrate the need to decide whether it is appropriate to put emphasis and resources into staff retention. As the timeline highlights, choices on who will be responsible for overseeing exits would ideally happen at the decision point to exit, although this was not always the case for the participating organisations.

→ Supporting staff

Providing support for staff at headquarters and country level was a main focus of conversation. We recognised that, at the very least, there is a need to be aware of the national legislation on redundancy and redeployment in different contexts, and to comply with this throughout the exit process.

However, we debated whether organisations should do more than what is required legally. Examples might include:

- Offering redeployment opportunities into other roles for staff whose jobs are at risk.
- Introducing a flexible working policy, such as the opportunity to do compressed or staggered hours.
- Providing support for learning and professional development, such as formal training, contributions towards higher education courses, and peer-to-peer mentoring.

- Enhancing employability through CV writing and interview skills training; emphasising that by delivering exits, staff are building up a wide variety of skills that will be needed in the sector.
- Focusing on staff wellbeing, such as by regularly checking in with staff.
- Acknowledging that although saying goodbye to colleagues is difficult, steps can be taken to boost morale, such as by celebrating achievements of staff when they leave.
- Keeping staff updated on what is happening can also provide reassurance and mitigate uncertainty.

→ Responsibility for partner staff

What responsibility does an existing organisation have for the staff of partners? Building on conversations in the meeting on capacity building and relationship management, the group agreed on the need for clear parameters that are communicated well to partners in order to make it easier to manage expectations. A number of mechanisms were suggested, including:

- Providing technical support if local legislation is weak.
- Discussing needs with partners. Oxfam GB, for example, have talked to partners in advance of the exit about what they can offer to build their capacity.
- Transferring assets to partners on exit.
- Exploring opportunities to help staff and volunteers move into new jobs, including providing training.

→ Dealing with grievances

Finally, we debated how to deal with grievances that can arise towards the end of exits, often from staff that care deeply about their work and may be unhappy with the decision to exit. We agreed that one way of mitigating grievances is to ensure independent mechanisms

are in place for handling complaints. How the decision and rationale is communicated, and the terminology used, can also prevent unhappiness in the first place.

Ideas for overcoming risks to organisational reputation included managing media messaging on the reasons for exit, and having proactive internal and external communication policies in place. Although this was not the case for all of the organisations, these mechanisms would ideally be in place by the time the decision to exit is communicated.



Image 3: NGO funerals. Illustration by Bill Crooks.

TIPS FOR PRACTITIONERS: STAFF CARE AND PERSONNEL

Investment in staff care is an integral part of responsible exits. An analysis of the timeline exercise and debates highlights certain actions that could be taken to make the exit process less painful:

At the start of the relationship: have a good understanding of the legislation of the country you are working in.

At the programme design stage: develop or refresh guidance on duty of care and make sure staff and partners know where this can be accessed.

Between programme design and the decision point to exit: decide whether you will undertake informal consultations with staff before the decision to exit; think about whether this would create unnecessary amounts of uncertainty or whether a sharper process would be better.

At the decision point to exit: decide who will be responsible for overseeing exits, and the type of support they will require to do so. If roles are at risk, review the policies and procedures for redundancies in place, both at headquarter and national or country office level. Ensure mechanisms are in place for handling complaints, and establish a proactive communications policy. Discuss with partners the support they require. Make sure management of all affected organisations develop and agree clear plans and strategies so that staff get the same information and support where necessary.

During implementation: provide appropriate support for staff responsible for carrying out, and affected by, the exit. Recognise that staff retention and motivation may become an issue and require additional resources. Ensure you are aware of the national legislation on redundancy and redeployment in the country.

Post-exit: consider how learning from the exit will be retained, particularly if staff have moved into new positions. Undertake follow-up conversations with staff, such as through post-exit calls, or conduct an evaluation if appropriate.

Meeting 4: Leadership

We had repeatedly returned to issues of organisational systems, management input and leadership buy-in to ensure that exit processes are not only well-designed and executed, but that principles of exit are embedded into programme design, relationships with partners and capacity building activities.

We decided that we had to tackle the topic of leadership and exit, and invited senior management to engage in the final meeting. We were joined by CEOs and Country Directors from three of the participating organisations.

We wanted to come away with recommendations focused on how to ensure leadership buy-in to exit processes, build awareness of responsible exit and embed good practice.

We brainstormed key questions on leadership and clustered them into six themes:

- **Which leaders?** How are local leaders, such as regional managers and country directors, involved in decision-making throughout exit processes?
- **Support for leaders:** How can leaders be supported?
- **Roles of leaders:** What is the role of leaders, including Boards and Trustees, in championing throughout the exit process?
- **Leadership at key moments:** How do we get all relevant staff to focus on the importance of thinking exit/sustainability at the design stage?
- **Embedding learning:** What processes need to be in place to ensure learning is not lost as we move into the next strategy, phase, and so on? Are leaders involved or driving this?
- **Challenges:** What are the points on the timeline where lack of leadership causes the greatest problems?

Box 9: Meeting objectives

- Share emerging issues around leadership with senior management
- Examine leadership of exit processes from the country and partner perspective
- Explore different points in the timeline of exit where leadership is most necessary
- Look at lessons learned from past experiences, as well as ideas for better practice in the future.

Mapping questions, issues and decisions

We then explored stages in the timeline of exit where leadership input is needed, and has been lacking to date (Figure 7).

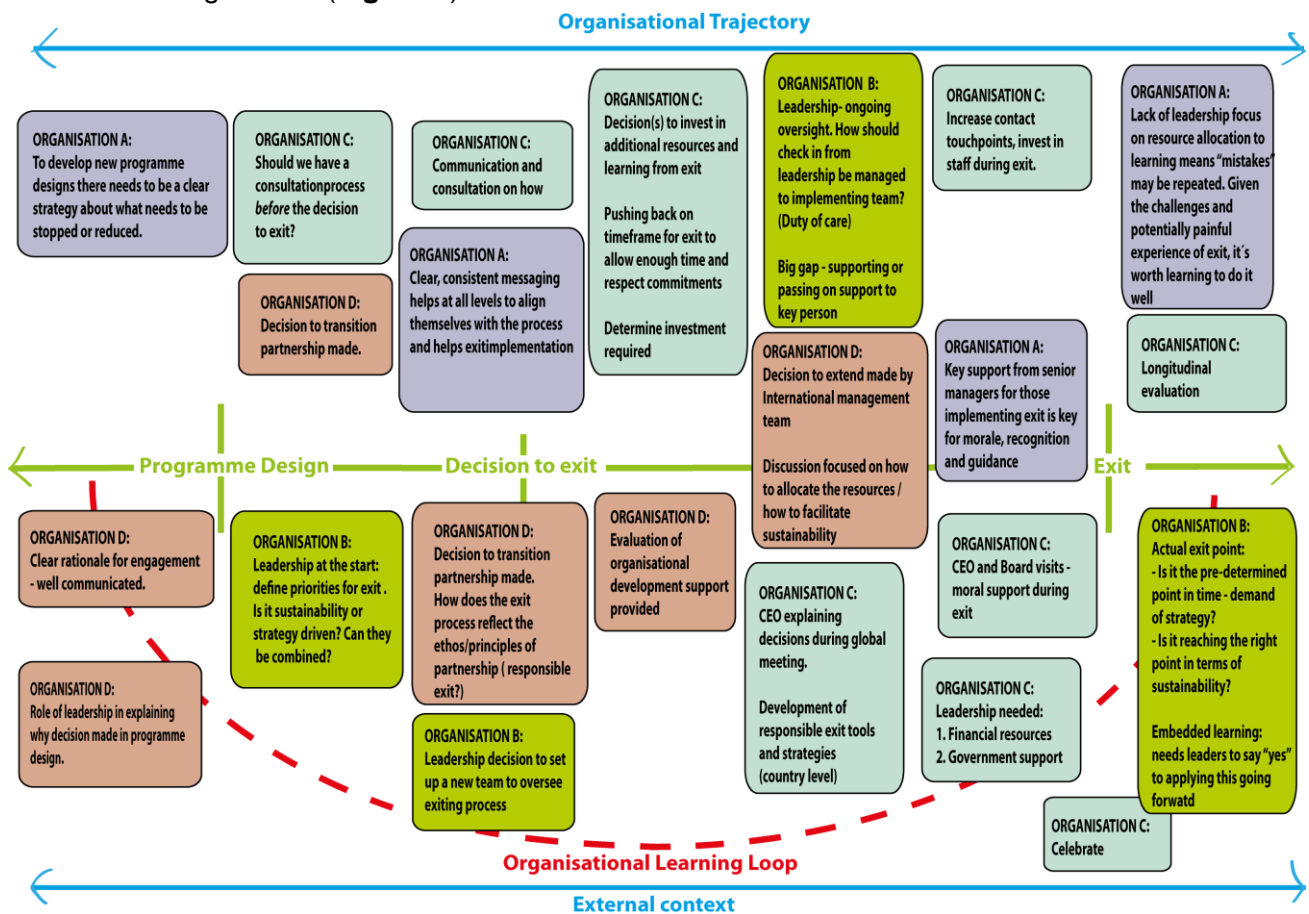


Figure 7: Leadership in the exit timeline.

Using the timeline prompted discussion on a number of issues, including:

→ Providing the right support at the right times

Linking back to previous discussions on staff care and personnel, we acknowledged that managers and senior staff need to provide their time, status and thinking to those responsible for carrying out the exit. Reasons include avoiding premature departure of staff and reducing feelings of isolation when others are scoping new projects and partnerships.

We recognised that there is a need for senior staff and managers to balance being flexible, such as extending the timeframe for exit when appropriate; while being directive, including pushing back to see through exits as planned. Examples shared for how leaders can best create a supportive environment include increasing touch points and checking in with staff at key moments in the process; having a positive mind-set and leading by example; and ensuring those responsible for exits do not feel isolated.

We also discussed engagement of leadership with partner staff, and the benefits of senior management visiting the closing office. For Country Directors from EveryChild, visits from leadership during the exit motivated teams and increased their confidence in the process.

→ **Clarity and communication**

The group felt strongly that clear and consistent messaging from leaders is important in helping staff to align themselves with the process; avoiding issues of disbelief; and showing respect for staff, partners and communities.

However, we acknowledged that involving other staff in developing messages can be beneficial, as the example from Sightsavers in **Box 10** demonstrates.

Box 10: Who should communicate? A practical example from Sightsavers

Between 2012-2014, Sightsavers undertook a lengthy exercise to ensure all programmatic activity was strongly linked to the delivery of their new strategy. Many current projects had been launched prior to the new strategy, and a review was needed to map all previously-planned project activities and objectives to the organisation's new strategic aims. This took place in two distinct phases:

1. A top-level **portfolio rationalisation exercise** (2012), which was a relatively light process to flag up projects that were obviously outside the remit of the new strategic direction. These were phased out over the coming months and years.
2. An in-depth **strategic alignment process** (2014) which was an in-depth analysis of all the remaining projects, to review the detail of all activities and give an overall categorisation of how well (or otherwise) the project met the organisation's strategic objectives. This categorisation determined which projects were allowed to continue and which were phased out.

Both phases of the exercise resulted in difficult decision-making, and in numerous project exits. The CEO took responsibility for top-level communications in both instances to ensure that the rationale was clearly explained and that messaging was consistent and came with authority. However, beneath that sat a secondary layer of communications: a group of key managers (including regional directors) were involved in managing the process and each took responsibility for ensuring that region- or department-specific communications were filtered down through the organisation. Central templates and guidance notes, for example how to manage communications to partners, were made available to programme teams, but they were given the right to edit these as necessary to take into account their own context and circumstances so that locally-appropriate messages could be sent out to partners.

We also debated when is the appropriate time to communicate with those who might be affected, and whether there should be a consultation process before the decision to exit. Some questions raised by the group include: what would be the benefit of consulting? Would it lead to better outcomes? Would consulting create unnecessary amounts of uncertainty, angst and unhappiness? How far would partner views be taken into consideration?

→ Embedding exit issues and learning across organisations

Knowledge and experience is built up by those implementing exits, but there is a risk that this gets lost and mistakes repeated if key people move on or teams are too insular.

We discussed ways to embed learning and generate awareness of the importance of thinking about exit strategies. These included: building monitoring of, planning for and learning about exits into mid-term and strategy reviews; ensuring the team carrying out exit is sharing their experiences widely and continually, for example by integrating them into different teams at key moments; and recognising that responsible exit is an important investment by allocating resources for the time to stop, reflect, evaluate and learn.



Image 4: 'Thinking: please wait'. By Wade M via Flickr. Creative Commons Licensing.

→ Post-exit evaluation

A final area of discussion was post-exit evaluation. Although we weren't able to tackle the topic in depth, we touched on whether evaluations should be conducted, how, and when these should take place.

We heard how EveryChild had commissioned INTRAC to carry out a two-part, longitudinal evaluation of its responsible exit process. The purpose is to find out the extent to which the organisation achieved its aim of exiting responsibly from its country offices and partners from 2012 onwards.¹⁷

The group also shared reasons for not conducting evaluations, including a lack of time, resources and internal demand. Questions were also raised around how spending on evaluations can be justified if there is no tangible output, and what the INGO's responsibility is if the evaluation shows that things have not gone to plan after the exit (which linked back to earlier discussions on where to draw the line in issues that arise).¹⁸

¹⁷ For more information see James et al (2015)

¹⁸ For more on post-closure evaluation see INTRAC (2016b)

TIPS FOR PRACTITIONERS: LEADERSHIP

The timeline and discussions show that leaders need to champion exit, contribute their thinking and support, and ensure that necessary resources are allocated to the process. Some key moments where certain decisions and actions could be taken by leadership include:

At the start of the relationship: ensure there is a clear rationale for engagement that is well communicated by leadership and documented.

At the programme design stage: explain decisions made and ensure there is a record of these that staff and partners can access.

Between programme design and the decision point to exit: define criteria and priorities for exit – will decisions be driven by the organisational strategy (i.e. how well projects and programmes fit within focus regions or thematic areas) or are they sustainability driven (i.e. when there is no longer a need for the organisation's support)?

At the decision point to exit: provide a clear, consistent rationale on the decision to exit and how it will take place; give consideration to who internal communications should come from and when.

During implementation: determine the level of investment required to implement the exit smoothly. Find an appropriate way to support the implementing team at the right times. Update those affected on progress before the moment of exit.

Post-exit: celebrate achievements with staff and partners instead of commiserating. Allocate time and resources for embedding learning and making sure it is carried forward into the next programming cycle and organisational strategy. Consider commissioning or conducting an evaluation.

Conclusions

At the beginning of this paper we highlighted key issues the sector is facing on exit strategies, including a lack of shared knowledge. By offering learning from the Action Learning Set (ALS), we hope we are some way towards addressing this. The perspectives in this paper are mainly from the agencies withdrawing and we feel that the absence of southern partner voices in learning on exit remains a gap. We conclude with some take-home messages on both the process and exit strategies.

The process

Using an ALS approach was appropriate for the complex topic of exit strategies, where there was no clear answer to the issues faced.¹⁹ Our process learning includes:

→ **Who is in the room is important**

We broke our own rule of aiming for continuity in participants due to staff changes within organisations (some of which were due to exit processes!) and because it became important to include people with experience on certain topics. This proved very beneficial and brought perspectives to discussions that would otherwise have been lacking. However, changing participants could be slightly frustrating at times as we missed continuity and the depth of trust and discussion it helps to generate.

→ **Checking-in with participants is necessary**

Having a slot on burning issues was a good way for the group to share challenges they had faced since the previous meeting, and became quite a cathartic exercise. It also highlighted which topics were coming up repeatedly that could be tackled in subsequent meetings.

→ **Encouraging openness gives reassurance**

Creating a safe space in which we could be honest about positive and negative experiences provided reassurance that others were facing similar issues. This peer support was especially important in overcoming the feelings of isolation, frustration and doubt often felt by those working on exits. However, there was some tension between encouraging openness through creating a confidential space versus sharing information with other colleagues in order to promote cross-organisational learning and increase impact. Understanding which information could be shared beyond the group was difficult at times.

→ **The timeline exercise helps to order thinking**

The group didn't all have positive exit experiences when we first came together, but by the last meeting we noticed how far we had come in our thinking. Although we didn't fully develop it as a tool, the timeline was integral to this. It simulated debate and gave structure to discussions. It also highlighted gaps in approaches, which encouraged ideas on what could be done differently.

¹⁹ INTRAC (2012b)

A question for the future is whether this way of thinking can be useful to others and lead to an impact organisationally, for example by resulting in learning on exits that feeds into strategies, policies and practices.

Exit strategies

We made a conscious decision not to come up with a set of rules on what makes for best practice. Although there might be an 'ideal' exit (for example thinking about exit at the design stage, having a structured process at the time of exit, carefully leading through the process, and evaluating afterwards), in reality each withdrawal is organisation and context-specific, and in our experience messy. In other words, there is no 'one-size-fits-all' model. Instead, we encourage others grappling with exit issues to use elements from this paper that are most relevant, useful and realistic. Significant exits (i.e. with long-term partners or multiple country exits) are also organisational change processes for which support and learning from the change management discipline can be very useful. Our final recommendations include:

→ Don't panic about principles

These can be a valuable reference/guidance point but it is important not to get stressed if they have not been developed early on. Instead, use this as an opportunity to involve partners in the process and review what exists around exit, guidelines and values.

→ Think holistically about capacity building, organisational development and sustainability

It can be beneficial to frame exit as sustainability planning and consider this early on in the relationship. Sustainability should also be incorporated into ongoing capacity building with partners, but make sure you find a balance between supporting and enabling partners to become independent.

→ Recognise the value of investing in staff care

Do not underestimate the need to look after staff within headquarters and partner organisations who are implicated by exit, and factor in additional resources for this. Be clear on your boundaries of responsibility - will you meet the basic minimum required or go the extra mile in supporting staff during the transition?

→ Lead by example

Senior staff, management and trustees need to champion exit. This is essential in motivating staff, and ensuring they are well-supported. Leaders also need to make the necessary resources available for embedding learning and building monitoring of, planning for, and learning about exits into mid-term and strategy reviews. This is crucial in order to avoid repeating mistakes.

→ Investment

It is important to recognise that a good exit strategy might require investment, and allocate the necessary resources.

Postscript

Two years before this paper was published, a group of staff from five UK-based organisations signed up to the Action Learning Set with the motivation to improve approaches to exits from countries, regions, projects and programmes, or reflect on and document their experience.

Throughout the process, every organisation went through some form of major transition or restructure. There were a number of changes to staff and within teams (for example for some, staff numbers diminished in line with planned exits, others moved into new roles, others to different organisations). These situations are a reality for many in the sector, so what happened to the learning that was built up through the ALS? What's been left behind (or not as the case may be)?

Shahina Bahar, British Red Cross:

The ALS was a very useful space for us to learn from other colleagues although not only specifically on exit. The biggest influence was on how it informed our thinking on partnerships, particularly on new ones which were being scoped and since established. It also has stimulated more critical thinking on sustainability and how to orient our organisational and capacity development work with partners in support of this. We have a new set of country plans and regional strategies which also gives us a greater idea and timeframe in which to plan exits and carry them out responsibly. Also given that we are part of the wider Red Cross/Red Crescent movement this has triggered greater consideration on how to plan for and undertake exit with others within the network.

The ALS was a positive experience for us, at a time of flux for our organisation yet also enabling us to challenge our assumptions and refine our thinking with colleagues from the wider sector.

Lucy Morris, EveryChild:

EveryChild had already gone through its own rapid learning cycle by the time the ALS was formed. However the ALS provided an opportunity for us to learn how other organisations were approaching the same subject and to confirm that we were on the right track, so it provided welcome reassurance about our own practice. It was also useful to have external pressure from INTRAC to document aspects of EveryChild's learning about responsible exit, as well as their editorial support and access to INTRAC's Praxis Note publications platform²⁰ and dissemination channels.

The ALS was also useful in terms of staff motivation – both my own, and for some of my colleagues (Country Directors in India and Malawi for example). EveryChild has gone through big changes over the last four years, and the majority of staff have now been made redundant as the bulk of EveryChild's programmes have been closed in preparation for the transfer of their remaining assets to Family for Every Child, and my role as Head of Programmes has been made redundant now too. However, myself and the former Programme Director (Tracey Martin) continue to work for EveryChild on a consultancy basis to oversee the final two programme exits in Nepal and Cambodia, so our learning on exit

²⁰ Morris (2015)

continues to be retained by the organisation and will hopefully be shared with future employers.

Jonathan Puddifoot, Oxfam:

A couple of clear lessons from the ALS are apparent to us:

1) Having inter agency discussion around the difficult decisions of exit have allowed us to see the question of exit from a number of new angles. The WWF model of associate organisations as well as affiliate offices in countries, for instance, has given us new ideas about how country exits could be developed in the future.

2) Early engagement on exit is key to its success. Opportunities, if left long enough, can become crises. We have seen in Georgia and Armenia how fully engaging on as many aspects of exit as we can, at least three years ahead, allows us to really shape the future. We already have two registered spin-offs who are building up their pipelines two years ahead of our office closure.

Daisy Macdonald, Sightsavers:

At Sightsavers our recent experience of a well-managed and documented withdrawal process in one of our countries gives us the model of how to efficiently manage the complex process of exiting. There is a clear consensus among stakeholders that much of the work carried out will be sustainable and will continue after our departure. However to support transition, workshops and seminars have been conducted for a range of partner organisations on proposal development and fundraising, and the creation of logframes as part of the closure strategy in order to further strengthen partner capacities for the future. Our internal audit of the exit process found all areas such as governance, staff care, stakeholder engagement, disposal of assets and document archiving had been carried out very satisfactorily and this provides us with key learning for future withdrawals. This experience in conjunction with participation in the ALS will link with and support the stronger emphasis we now have on planning sustainability within our project design process.

Clare Crawford, WWF-UK:

In WWF-UK the key learning areas developed by the Transformations team overseeing exits were handed over to the Design and Impact (M&E) team. This team have taken on the responsibility of encouraging the consideration of sustainability planning and exits into the design of new projects and programmes. They have also commissioned the development of sustainability planning materials to supplement the limited guidance that existed within the WWF Project and Programme Management Standards (for Results Based Management) in order to help all WWF Network colleagues with sustainability planning. This provides an opportunity for training of colleagues in sustainability, alongside other updates commissioned in recent months.

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INTRAC blogs on exit strategies and sustainability

- [Go through the door marked 'Exit' to reach sustainable development](#)
- [Leading by example? Why leadership buy-in is crucial to NGO exit strategies](#)
- [Exit: the end of the road?](#)
- [The human side of the exit strategy: staff care and personnel management](#)
- [Is there such a thing as responsible exit?](#)
- [Capacity Building, Partnership Relations and Exit Strategies](#)
- [Strategic funerals in capacity building](#)
- [NGO exit strategies: Are principles for closing projects or ending partnerships necessary?](#)

Annex 1: Of Exits, Transitions, Full Stops and Spin-Offs - unpacking the terminology around aid withdrawal

During the Action Learning Set, a strong interest in exploring the use of terms around aid withdrawal emerged. Some of the key questions raised include:

- Is there value in picking apart the power dynamics and politics behind the use of certain terms?
- Who chooses the language and the terms?
- Is language consistently used?
- How does the language used relate to principles / values?
- What is missing in the definitions of the terms? For example 'transition' from what to what? 'Transformation' from what to what?
- Are there key moments in the exit process where different types of language might be used or be appropriate?

The table below collates definitions of terms and the ways in which they are used from within the Action Learning Set group but also other key documents on exit.

Term	Who uses	Ways in which used
Exits	GrantCraft	An exit can involve closing a project or programme the foundation funded or implemented; or it can be an exit from an entire organisation or network the foundation funded or operated.
	Kvinna till Kvinna	... refers to the complete phasing out of all funded activities in a programme country or region.
	Levinger and McLeod	Three different exit strategy scenarios are particularly prevalent: phasing <i>down</i> , phasing <i>over</i> and phasing <i>out</i> .
	EveryChild	Previous experiences of exit have informed how EveryChild decided to approach partnerships and exit.
	WWF-UK	This was indeed the case for WWF-UK which had embarked on a new five-year strategy for the period 2014 to 2018, a key part of which is to "exit" from a number of projects and programmes so that resources can be focussed on new priorities.

Withdrawal	GrantCraft	As a funder to a certain extent you are co-responsible for the “after-the-exit” situation if your withdrawal dramatically changes the overall flow of income or business model.
	Kvinna till Kvinna	Today the EU and the Croatian Government are the major sources of funding. As previously mentioned, the opportunities for domestic funding have been of vital importance for the survival of the majority of the organisations. These sources have however not made up for the withdrawal of foreign funds.
	Levinger and McLeod	A resolution of the tension between the withdrawal of assistance and commitment to the goals of sustainable development lies at the heart of successful exit strategies.
Transitions	GrantCraft	Used in various ways in the Foundations Moving On document. For example: ‘Different foundations deal with different kinds of exits, but all find it hard to manage these transitions.’ Also used in monetary terms. ‘Many foundations include as part of an exit strategy the provision of a final transfer of funds, sometimes also called transition or tie-off-of-legacy grants, or even endowments.’
	Levinger and McCloud	Anecdotal evidence suggests that it is often problematic to “transition” from a food-delivery program to a more collaborative development effort with the same group of stakeholders.
	WWF-UK	The team started as ‘transitions’ and is now ‘transformations’
Transformations	GrantCraft	Term used in the Foundations Moving On document, in terms of transformation of relationships and ‘managing transformation’, which is referred to in the following way: ‘The actual exit is a process of transformation for all involved. It is much more than a financial exercise, and managing it demands skill.’
	Kvinna till Kvinna	A comprehensive study conducted by Jerve, A. & Slob, A. in 2008, and jointly undertaken by Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, evaluates the management of transformation processes in fourteen different bilateral exit cases.
Handing over	Kvinna till Kvinna	Handing over ownership is often a key issue in exit strategies.
	GrantCraft	An exit may involve handing over a brand you developed, either as an operational foundation or as a sponsor. Reputations are at stake.
Full stops	WWF-UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where the previously funded work ceases entirely • Some exits are full-stops at the end of contractual obligations

Spin-offs	GrantCraft	How operational foundations end programmes: <i>Start-up and spin-off an independent organisation</i> The foundation has established its own start-ups and acts as shareholder or founding member using different, appropriate legal forms depending on each case. The explicit intention of the foundation is that these organisations or businesses generate income and become – eventually – financially independent when it comes to their recurrent costs.
	WWF-UK	Exits should be seen as a mark of success, and “spin-offs” in particular should be viewed a highly creative process. Spin offs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Creation of a new entity ○ Self-sufficient ○ No longer a donor relationship ○ Might continue similar work ○ Not the same as a franchise ○ Must break off ties to parent
Internal spin-offs	WWF-UK	Where work may transfer from one WWF-UK team to another
External spin-offs	WWF-UK	Where the intention is to create a new, independent entity to carry on with the work in question
Capacity building (relative to exit/withdrawal)	Kvinna till Kvinna	Capacity building should take place throughout the cooperation with the partner organisations, and ought to respond to partner organisations’ needs and requests for capacity building. The investments made in human resources, organisation, programme development, networks etc. will contribute to the sustainability of the organisations. When coming to the last stages of presence in a country the organisations should preferably have sufficient skills in organisational management including leadership and management of funds, project planning and result based management, fundraising, anti corruption measures, outreach/advocacy, human rights issues, and capacity to mobilise around particular issues. It is also important for the transfer of knowledge in the above-mentioned areas to be anchored within the organisations.
	Levinger and McLeod	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In this paper, we will use “capacity building” as a general-purpose term to describe the broad category of activities intended to help local organisations (including NGOs, government, and community groups) accomplish their missions more efficiently and effectively. ● In the second scenario (phase over), the emphasis is on institutional capacity building so that vital services can continue under new, localized management. This strategy is designed to ensure that local actors have the skills and resources they need to deliver high-quality services until such time as those services achieve a sustainable benefit flow that doesn’t depend on service

		continuation. This strategy reflects the ideal of empowerment by allowing local actors to take control of the processes that affect their lives.
Exit strategy	Kvinna till Kvinna	A programme exit strategy is a plan describing how we intend to phase out our programme while ensuring that the achievement of our programme goals are not jeopardised and that progress towards these goals will continue. When planned together with partner organisations well ahead of a phase out, an exit strategy increases the likelihood of sustainability.
	GrantCraft	'Exit strategy' is used throughout the document.
	Levinger and McLeod	As above, 'exit strategy' is used throughout the document.
Legacies	Oxfam GB	Oxfam GB aims to maximise the value of work done, its legacy, and the ability of others to carry on what has been done previously.
	GrantCraft	Overall it seems that good exits are both about relations and about the legacy that is left.
Phase down	Levinger and McLeod	Project activities are reduced
Phase over	Levinger and McLeod	In the phase <i>over</i> strategy, the sponsoring agency develops a plan for transferring the program (or a portion thereof) to another implementing entity.
Phase out	Levinger and McLeod	Phase <i>out</i> occurs when the sponsor withdraws its involvement in the program without turning it over to another institution for continued (albeit perhaps reduced) implementation.
	Kvinna till Kvinna	A programme exit strategy is a plan describing how we intend to phase out our programme while ensuring that the achievement of our programme goals are not jeopardised and that progress towards these goals will continue.

Sources:

Levinger, B. and McLeod, J. (2002) 'Hello, I Must Be Going: Ensuring Quality Services and Sustainable Benefits through Well-Designed Exit Strategies.' Newton: Education Development Center, Inc.

GrantCraft (2013) 'Foundations Moving On: Ending programmes and funding relationships.' New York/Brussels: The Foundation Centre and the European Foundation Centre.

INTRAC (2014) 'Inception Workshop Report - Programme Exit Action Learning Set.' Internal document.

Kvinna till Kvinna (2011) 'Making Achievements Last: Learning from Exit Experiences.' Johanneshov: The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation.

WWF-UK (2014) 'The role, development and delivery of successful exit strategies – summary report.' Online. Available at:

<http://www.intrac.org/resources.php?action=resource&id=810> (last accessed 06 November 2015).

Annex 2: Existing exit principles compiled for INTRAC Action Learning Set (May 2014)

The table below provides comparative examples of principles taken from key existing literature and guidelines.

Kvinna till Kvinna (2011)	GrantCraft (2013)	Levinger and McLeod (2002)
<p>Guiding Principles for Making Exit Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need to be clear about how we intend to make our programme sustainable, i.e. what our exit strategy is. • When planned together with partner organisations well ahead of a phase out, an exit strategy increases the likelihood of sustainability. • When entering into a programme country we need to know which of our goals we wish to sustain. This can help clarify and define our role to local partner organisations as being time limited, thus reducing the potential for misunderstandings and future dependency. As the context changes over time, we also need to be flexible and ready to modify the strategy. • A well-managed exit includes careful consultation with all stakeholders, long-term planning, flexibility and good monitoring of results. <p>A Kvinna till Kvinna exit strategy includes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Exit criteria 2. Measurable indicators of progress in meeting the criteria 3. A time line for the exit process 4. Activities and a division of responsibilities 5. Mechanisms to assess progress (monitoring system) <p>The following points have been important for us to increase sustainability when phasing out:</p>	<p>Nine helpful practices:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Look before you leap – you can prevent unhappy exits by being honest and rational about why you enter a partnership. Many unhappy exits seem to come from flawed decisions to enter a field or a relationship, from decisions that are based on incomplete or biased information or an emotional interpretation of information. 2. Be prepared ...Nailing down what you really want to leave behind can help you in turn to identify what the true sense of your funding and legacy is. 3. Think sustainability early on – So what do you leave when you exit? Do you seek something that needs to last? What has to actually remain over time? You have to make sure that all partners share this expectation and that what you provide and fund is helpful to achieve that. When considering support, a funder has to reflect on this and table it in conversations with grantees and partners at the start. 4. Talk timelines ...it seems to be practical wisdom to talk at any – and possibly every – stage of the relationship with partners about timelines: both your timeline and theirs. 5. Manage irrationalities in relations – If you want your charities, your partners or a field you intervene in to become sustainable and independent, you need to give the actors space and freedom...you have to find the right degree of involvement. 6. Reflect, be patient and realistic – all too often exits come out of nowhere... regular reviews, in which information from different sources is triangulated, seem helpful and may prevent rushed or crash exits. 	<p>Six elements of an effective exit strategy [these are interdependent] and guiding principles for each stage:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Plan for exit from the earliest stages of programme design <i>Guiding principles:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility • Ongoing review and revision • Transparency • Participation 2. Develop partnerships and local linkages <i>Guiding principles:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity • Complementarity • Clear and common goals 3. Build local organisational and human capacity <i>Guiding principles:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on existing capacity • Model (on organisational and individual) behaviours • Create environments that support new behaviours • Monitor progress 4. Mobilise local and external resources <i>Guiding principles:</i>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal achievement - When considering exit, it is important to identify what your organisation regards as the key objectives that might in turn be indicators of sustainable change. • Funding – Having an exit strategy provides opportunity to plan ahead and find funding for the programme, thus increasing the chances of following through on your strategies. • Context – Especially in long-term partnerships and in volatile political situations many factors influencing sustainability will change over time. A flexible timeline is therefore necessary for a successful exit. • Our added value – Focusing on what your organisation can contribute with will improve your strategic thinking and thus the chances of making achievements last. <p><i>Post exit</i></p> <p>Evaluating the exit strategy In order to learn from our phase out, an evaluation should be carried out when a period of time has elapsed following the exit.</p> <p>New relationship with partner organisations During the phase out we should discuss with our partner organisations the kind of relationship that would be most useful when the phase out is completed. The relationship should be based on common values and goals.</p>	<p>7. More than money – As a funder, your relationship with your partners probably involves much more than money. Ensure this non-financial contribution aspect is also part of your exit considerations. Sometimes there simply is no more funding, but you can still draw on your non-monetary assets to add value to the work of your (former) partners.</p> <p>8. Communicate, communicate, and communicate – once you have taken an exit decision you need to communicate. Take your time, use a variety of channels, ensure a unified message, ensure that the hierarchy takes responsibility, repeat yourself, and do not assume that your messages will be easily absorbed and processed.</p> <p>9. Revisit and learn – Only rarely do funders go back five or more years later to revisit former grantees or partners to look back at the exit process and see what remains after the exit. It is not a bed of roses, yet those who have done this have found it to be an enlightening and inspiring exercise.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to progress toward sustainability • To the extent possible, generate resources locally • Increasingly, bring external resources under local control and management <p>5. Stagger the phase out of various programme activities and resources <i>Guiding principles:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider providing new activities or types of support as financial resources are phased out <p>6. Allow roles and relationships to evolve and continue after exit <i>Guiding principles:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevent slippage by re-entering if necessary
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Sources: GrantCraft (2013); Levinger, B. and McLeod, J. (2002); Kvinna till Kvinna (2011)

